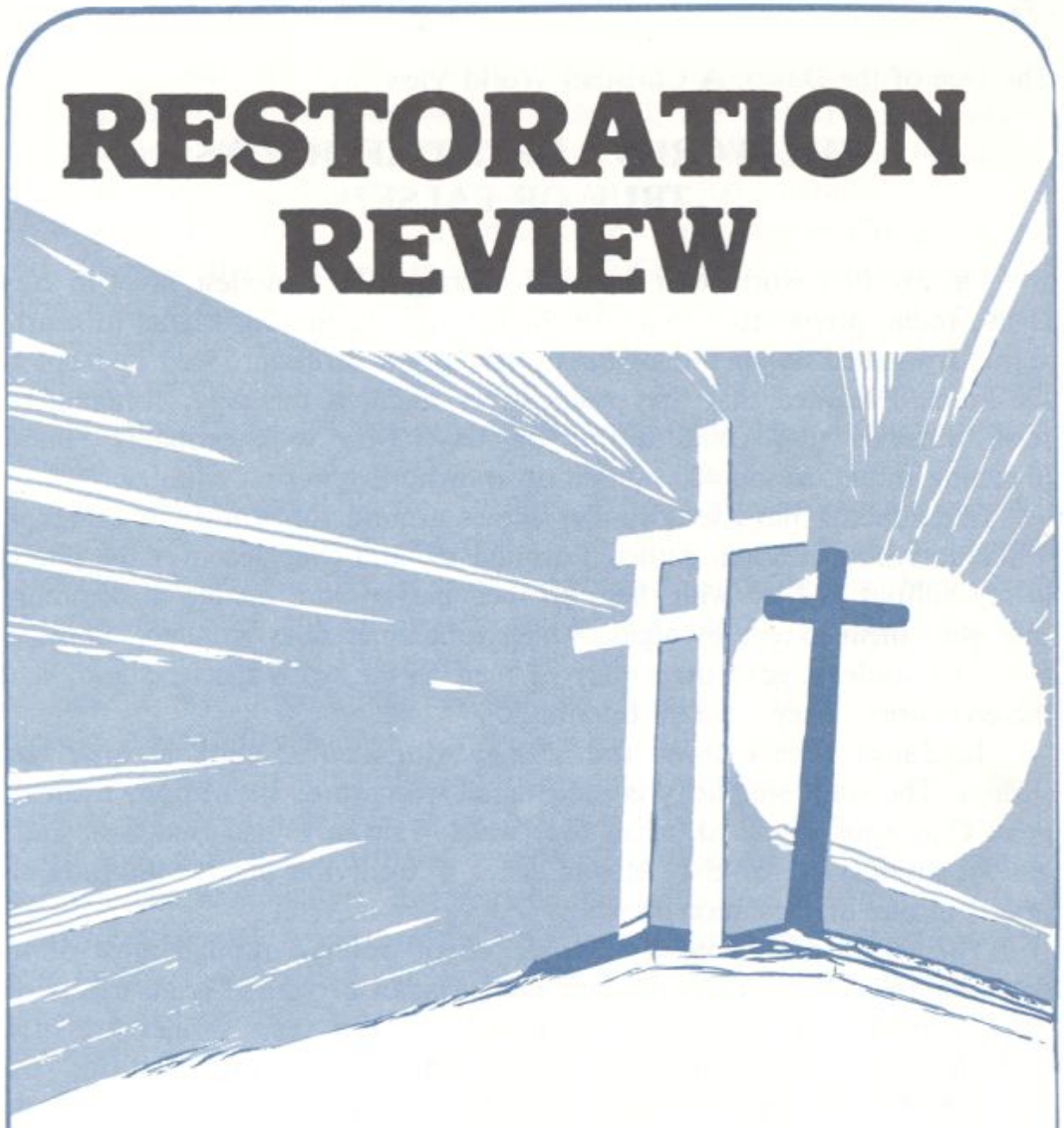
RESTORATION REVIEW



There is some truth in *many* religions but there is the highest truth in *one* religion. In a series of mountains there is, normally, one higher than the others, but this does not deny the existence of many peaks. — *Elton Trueblood*

See: *The World's Great Religions: True or False?*

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Volume 26, No. 8 **Leroy Garrett, Editor** **October 1984**

The Doe of the Dawn: A Christian World View …

THE WORLD'S GREAT RELIGIONS: TRUE OR FALSE?

On my first world tour I stayed overnight in a modest hotel in New Delhi, India, preparatory to a visit the next day to the Taj Mahal in nearby Agra. I watched as an Indian family laid out a cardboard bed in front of the hotel. I learned that they spent every night in this way, foraging for food wherever they could during the day. They were probably Hindus (meaning India), as are 400 million others who live in that country.

Since then I have seen similar scenes around the world. In Bangkok, Thailand school children gathered around me and chuckled over the photos in my billfold as I sat with them on their playground, unable to communicate with them except by signs, which sometimes does wonders. Some of the older students gave me a tour of their shrine, with special attention to the crematory. They were all Buddhists.

In Taipei I have stood (no sitting) with Confucianists in their bare shrines. The stark simplicity is punctuated with words of wisdom from the great Confucius engraved on all four walls. Taiwan is also Buddhist, and I got an inside view of this religion when I spent the night with Buddhist priests in one of their monasteries.

The scenes are not always reflections of poverty, though most of the common folk of the East are very poor. Japan of course is an exception. Their religions are Shintoism and Buddhism, and their shrines are often both ancient and elegant. It was an impressive Shintoist shrine that President Reagan recently visited as a guest of the nation's head of state. That is the way of the East, where religion and the state are one and where the head of state is often deemed divine. The emperor of Japan was stripped of his divinity by the new constitution following World War 2, but the nation has the ideological capacity to return to this ancient myth.

Then there is Islam (improperly called Mohammedanism), which is one of only three universal religions, Buddhism and Christianity being the other two. The other religions are generally restricted to certain countries and nationalities. Judaism is sometimes considered universal, but its Gentile converts are usually by intermarriage. The three universal religions present faiths free of racial and national limitations so that any person anywhere may belong. Islam, its followers called Moslems, originated in Arabia, but it has spread

throughout the world, including the United States, where there are more Moslems than Presbyterians. Islam is the second largest of the world religions, next to Christianity, with over 500 million.

If we look at these religions in terms of numbers, we Christians are, outnumbered better than two to one, for all Christians number about one billion while the other great religions number more than two billion. We are not counting the tribal and primitive cults and minor religions, which would add many millions more. Christians are clearly in the minority, not only in terms of the pagan or non-believing world but even in terms of religions.

This creates a cruel dilemma for the Christian who believes his religion to be the only true religion and that all the other religions are false and their followers lost. He may see it as blasphemy to suppose that the God of heaven would pour out His wrath on the majority of mankind for not having a religion they had never heard of.

Part of my thesis is that as faithful Christians we do not have to believe any such thing as that. We do not have to conclude that Zoroaster, Confucius, Gautama (Buddha), Socrates and other leaders and their followers, all of whom lived long before Christ, are necessarily in hell because they were not Christians, anymore than we need to believe that a good man like Jeremiah was lost since he did not believe in Christ.

But neither can we accept the view that it makes no difference, that one religion is as good as another. The idea of the Tao (the Way) in Taoism, a religion of China, which offers an escape from desire through contemplation, cannot be compared with the ideal of the kingdom of God in Christian thought. The Upanishads, the conglomerate scriptures of Hinduism, which are contradictory and repetitious, cannot be put in the same class with the Holy Bible. Just as the ambiguous theology of Hinduism, which counts gods by the thousands and yet says there is one, pales before “the Lord thy God is one God” of Judaism. Not only does Buddha, the Enlightened One, grow dim when compared with Jesus Christ, but no one in the non-Christian religions even begins to compare to the wonderful Person of the Bible.

To say that the great religions are all the same and that it makes no difference is like saying that all cures for disease are the same or that it makes no difference how a bridge or building is erected, or that one theory of engineering is no better than another.

So, we must avoid both horns of the dilemma by avoiding arrogance on one hand and neutrality on the other. We can believe that the Christian faith is the highest expression of the revelation of God and yet believe that the truths of other religions are also of God. If all truth is of God, then the truths in Islam and Buddhism are as much from God as those in Christianity. And truth always liberates and beatifies. In spite of their mixture with error, the truths of the great religions have blessed their followers. Confucius, Zoroaster, Gautama, and Lao-Tse (Taoism) were blessings to their generation, despite some erroneous concepts. Mohammed, whose followers promoted Islam by the power of the sword (just as some Christians have done!), may be less admirable, but he gave the world the only great religion outside the Judeo-Christian tradition that believes in one God. *Allah is one!* is basic to the Moslem faith. Mohammed also taught his people to pray five times a day to the one God who is the absolute Ruler of the universe. How many Christians pray five times a day?

So, we can believe that the *highest* truth is in Christ and yet believe that there are many important truths in the other great religions of the world and that those truths also are from God.

Even our own Scriptures may allow for this. “Other sheep have I which are not of this fold,” said our Lord in Jn. 10:16, which is understood to be referring to the Gentiles. This being the case, would not these other sheep have prophets and revelation of some sort—light from God? In Acts 14:16 Paul says that “In the generations gone by God permitted all the nations to go their own ways,” which would surely include these ancient nations of the East (all these religions but Islam existed for centuries when Paul said that). But the apostle goes on to say: *And yet God did not leave Himself without witness.* While Paul refers to this witness as God’s benevolence in nature, that witness could also be in the person of these world prophets. In any event our own Scriptures never condemn the unbeliever (the one who has never heard) but only the disbeliever (the one who hears and rejects).

When Heb. 1:1 refers to God speaking to the fathers by way of the prophets “in many portions and in many ways,” must these prophets necessarily be limited to the *Hebrew* prophets? How about the many other nations? Was God without witness among this vast majority of the earth’s population. Could not Zoroaster, who was the first prophet of any religion to speak of the devil, be a witness of God among the Persians (so as to prepare the Magi for the Christ child!) as Isaiah was among the Jews?

It can be argued, as Paul Tillich has done, that the old religions were “anticipations of Christianity,” which, he added, should lay to rest all our theological arrogance. We are more dependent on each other than we might suppose, and, despite the great diversity, we have considerable in common. In listing some of these “anticipations” we can see how Christianity is the fulfillment of all the shadowy implications in the old religions.

There are striking parallels between Christ and Buddha, who was born about 563 B.C. Both had miraculous births, Buddha being conceived when his mother was smitten on the side by a white elephant. Both were tempted by the devil, Buddha being offered great empires by Mara the Prince of Evil. Both performed miracles, Buddha doing such things as leaping over broad rivers on horseback. Both were poor, itinerant teachers, walking from village to village, though Buddha was born rich. Both had a band of disciples, though Buddha was sometimes followed by 12,000 disciples. Both were persecuted and both returned good for evil, and both remained silent in the face of abuse. And both had a sense of humor! .

Moreover their teaching was strikingly similar in some areas: “Let a man overcome anger by kindness, evil by good” is from Buddha, but it could have come from Jesus as well. “Hatred ceases by love” could have been emphasized by Christ as much as it was by Buddha.

This should remind us that we follow Christ not so much for what he taught, for much of what he taught was not unique, but because of what Christ *was* and *is.* And this is the great difference between Christ and Buddha. While Buddha claimed to be enlightened, he did not claim to be inspired; he did not claim that any god was speaking through him or that he was in any sense divine. In fact Buddha was an atheist, in his mind at least, maybe not in his heart.

Buddha’s religion was ethical and of this world, not metaphysical and of another world. He was in fact radically pessimistic, basing his religion on the belief that birth itself is evil and that it is far better not to be born. This is the mission of Buddhism: to so live that you will not have to be punished by being born again and again in the endless flow of reincarnation. It is the law of Karma: souls are continually born as punishment for their previous evil lives. So Buddha, discovering this, brought to mankind the “gospel” of so living that you will never have to live again!

After meditating for seven years, much of it under the Bodhi-tree, he became enlightened in the principles of perfect justice by which one overcomes the evil cycle of birth and death and thus attains Nirvana, the Buddhist "heaven," which is the perfect peace of ceasing to exist. So Buddha gave to the world "The Four Noble Truths" and "the Eightfold Path," which identified man's selfish desires as the cause of human suffering and ways to control such desires. The Eightfold Path is very demanding: right views, right motives, right speech, right action, right living, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

If I were a missionary to the Buddhists, I would not repudiate their religion, but I would begin with these great truths, recognizing them as given by the God they do not yet know, and seek to show that their own laws given by Buddha, as does all law, condemn them as sinners, for no Buddhist, including Gautama himself, can measure up to such an ethical code. All those under law must turn to God's grace for "perfect justice," which we believe to be in Christ.

Poor Buddha, he lived to be 80, always teaching, always urging his monks to live by a code too lofty for sinful man to attain. At the very end he urged his disciples to "hold fast to the Truth," always an *impersonal* truth, and insisted that they should look only to themselves for help. Like all legalistic systems, it is an impossible religion to live up to. But still God used Buddha as a stepping-stone to something higher. He taught mankind the reality of sin and evil and showed them that their sufferings are caused by their own greed. He stressed the importance of truth and the quest for truth. And he gave them laws that reflected the universal laws of God. As we reach out to them as Christians we can start there and point to the grace of God as revealed in Christ.

Confucius, founder of a religion that now numbers around 400 million, mainly in China, was unlike Buddha, Socrates, and Christ, who never wrote anything that has been preserved, in that he wrote voluminous classics. While he was an agnostic like Buddha, his writings reflect his master passion, *morality,* and morality is religion socially expressed. He spoke of the Golden Rule 550 years before Christ, though he stated it negatively. When a disciple asked about perfect virtue, Confucius said: *Not to do unto others as you would not wish done unto yourself* And when he was asked to reduce the rule of life to one word, Confucius responded with *reciprocity,* by which he meant the virtuous person will not only return good for good but also good for evil.

Despite his suspicion of anything supernatural, one could not teach as he did about "the Way of the Higher Man" and not be close to God. He saw sincerity as the basis of character. He insisted that rulers should be moral examples and that the role of the state is to produce gentlemen, and to Confucius that meant *gentle* men. Like the framers of our own Constitution, he taught that a nation is to be ruled by laws, not men.

Living in a time of China's moral decadence, Confucius insisted that an immoral nation cannot survive, and to be moral a nation must constantly pursue truth and virtue. War comes when nations are improperly governed, and it is greed that makes a nation unclean. Like the prophets of Israel, he cried out for justice and compassion for all, including a fair distribution of wealth. He stressed such simple virtues as courtesy, respect for others, and affability. And he placed the moral law (of God?) above all man-made laws.

Generations later Chinese leaders sought to minimize his influence by ordering his writings destroyed. But the power of the pen proved mightier than the sword and Confucianism not only survived in China but lived on to give the nation such stability that she has withstood all cultural invasions, usually shaping her invaders into her own image. It is questionable even today if Communism with its immoral statism, can ever penetrate the soul of China, born of Confucius.

But the most impressive and one of the most ancient of the prophets was Zoroaster, who preached one God, Ahura-Mazda (the Lord of Light), to the Persians (now Iran), as early as 700 years before Christ. He, too, was miraculously conceived (he laughed aloud on the day of his birth!), tempted by the devil, and was given a Bible, called the Avesta, which contains a lofty ethic, which he was to preach to mankind.

The scriptures preached by Zoroaster contain familiar elements: good and evil spirits, with every soul having a guardian angel; heavenly paradise and purgatory, where one might suffer only 12,000 years before rising to heaven; a last judgment. The worst sin is unbelief and the highest virtue the Golden Rule, expressed negatively as with Confucius. All good people will join Ahura-Mazda in paradise.

Zoroaster arrived on the Persian scene when the land was steeped in crude idolatry: the worship of animals, ancestors, the earth and the sun. Mithra, the sun god, and Anaita, the goddess of fertility, were the chief deities. Zoroaster, shocked by the drunken orgies dedicated to such gods, cried out against such idolatry, and, like the prophets of Israel, preached that there was but one God who was Creator and Lord of the world. Like all good prophets he was ridiculed and persecuted, and he might have been forgotten if Darius

the king had not seen in his religion the ideals that would inspire the nation, and consequently declared war on the old cults and made Zoroastrianism the religion of the state.

The old prophet appears as modern as San Francisco when we find him preaching such virtues as purity and honesty and condemning such vices as sorcery and sodomy. The God he preached was the totality of all the forces in the universe that make for righteousness.

As evident in Iran today, the evil forces in time destroyed the heart of Zoroastrianism, so that once more there was the cult of Mithra and numerous deities. Zoroaster was conquered by the cultic priests and remembered only as one of the Magi. But small communities of true Zoroastrians survive today in both Iran and India, and they are known for their excellent morals and character. It might well have been that from such ones came the Magi, who saw that star in the East, to visit the Christ child. Zoroaster, their ancient prophet who proclaimed God as the loving heavenly Father, had all but foretold Christ's coming.

If one is inclined to dismiss these religions as inconsequential, he should realize that but for the accident of birth he might well have been a Moslem or a Confucianist. How would I want the matter judged if the roles of the family camped on the New Delhi sidewalk and my family living in Denton, Texas, were reversed, with us as the Hindus and they as the Christians? As a Hindu I would believe in the Absolute (Brahman), even if my teachers argue whether this God is personal or impersonal, and I would believe in a disciplined life that leads to illumination. If you as a Christian dismissed my religion as having no spiritual value, I would see you as one ignorant of a quest for truth that dates back 5,000 years. But should you understand my religion and realize that the Absolute I seek cannot be comprehended in either words or concepts, then I might listen, as the ancient Greeks listened to the apostle John, as you tell of the Logos or the Absolute that has become flesh and dwelt among men.

And you should not be judgmental toward me for believing in reincarnation, basic to both Buddhism and Hinduism, when your own Christ was not startled when it was supposed he was a reincarnated Old Testament prophet, nor did he think it strange that his own apostles supposed that a man born blind was in that condition because of sin in his previous existence. Multiplied millions in this "believing world" are reincarnationists, including the wisest men of antiquity, so don't put me down too quickly. My religion is also true— at least partly true, and I will settle for that, seeing the trauma with which truth comes.

It should at least humble us to realize that we are "Christians" by the fortunes of history. One historian refers to Zoroastrianism as "the religion that might have been ours"— if the Persians had defeated the Greeks at the pass of Thermopylae instead of the other way around, for then Europe would have had Persian culture rather than Graeco-Roman. But God was over-ruling history, we say, and so *we* became the true religion in time while the others became "false" religions. It may not be that simple.

As for me, I have an answer that serves my world view, though it, too, may be simple. I will walk with all these believers as far as the light they have takes them, and I will thank God for the walk and that these many paths are there. From that point on I will seek to lead them on to greater light, the Light that enlightens every person born into this world, which obviously includes them. And they will see, one day if not now, that the *cosmic* Christ, not just the Christ of the Judea-Christian religion, is Lord of heaven and earth and the Lord of glory.

He is the One that all the great religions of the world have been looking for, whether they realize it or not. —*the Editor*

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WHY CHURCH OF CHRIST EXCLUSIVISM MUST GO

This request from Ivory James, Jr., one of the ablest leaders among Churches of Christ, white or black, explains the reason for this article: "I know the demand on your time is great but I need a big favor. To supplement my own thinking and preparation for a major discussion with one of our Black leaders on the exclusive argument that we (Churches of Christ) are the only true Bible Christians. I would ask that you list your arguments against that notion."

Since my response to this may be of interest to our readers, I am making an essay of it as well as a letter to my good friend who ministers in West Palm Beach, Florida.

My reasons for insisting that Churches of Christ must surrender their "only true church" and "we are the only Christians" mentality are as follows:

1. *Such a claim is rude, arrogant, self-righteous, self-defeating, and, in the light of reality, sheer nonsense.*

It is rude because we say to other believers, who are as wise and righteous as we are, that they are not even Christians. It is arrogant because we exalt ourselves as right and everyone else wrong. It is self-righteous because we assume that we will be the only ones to go to heaven. It makes us too much like the Pharisee who "trusted in himself that he was righteous and despised others" (Lk. 18:9). It is self-defeating because we only hurt ourselves in making such a claim. It turns folk off, and they will not listen to us, just as we do not care to listen to a "know-it-all."

And when we consider that Churches of Christ, even when counting our many divisions, compose less than one-tenth of one percent of the millions that make up the Christian world it is sheer nonsense to claim that we are the only Christians. Furthermore, we dechristianize many of the noblest, most dedicated, most sacrificial believers that have ever lived, all through the centuries. We even sing their great hymns, as in the case of Martin Luther ("A Mighty Fortress Is our God") and John Henry Newman, who was a Catholic bishop ("Lead, Kindly Light"), and Charles Wesley, one of the founders of Methodism ("I Know that My Redeemer Lives"), and yet we do not allow that they were even Christians. Some died as martyrs in their efforts to translate the Bible we now read, such as William Tyndale, who was burned at the stake in Vilvorde, Belgium in 1536 for translating the Bible into English. He died for Christ and the Scriptures, and do we dare say he was not even a Christian since he did not belong to the Church of Christ?

2. *Such a claim implies that Christ had no church upon the earth and that there were no Christians during most of the past two thousand years.*

The Church of Christ that is associated with such papers as the *Gospel Echo* and the *Gospel Advocate* and such colleges as Southwestern Christian College and Abilene Christian University did not even exist until 1889. It was not until then (or about that time) that a group existed that used "Church of Christ" exclusively and thought of themselves as the only true church. The Campbell-Stone movement started almost a century earlier, and they came to wear *three* (and never just one) names: Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, and Church of Christ. But they never believed that they were the only Christians, but rather "Christians only." That their aim was to "unite the Christians in all the sects" was an admission that they recognized that there were other Christians.

The idea that the true church of the New Testament went into apostasy and ceased to exist, and then hundreds of years later Alexander Campbell came along and restored the true Church of Christ is a false idea. First of all, even Campbell did not believe that, and

his unity movement was based upon the premise drawn up by his father, Thomas Campbell: "The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one." This he wrote before their movement ever started, which shows that they believed the church already existed upon earth: "The Church of Christ *upon earth* . . ." Moreover, the Scriptures make it clear that Christ's church would always exist: "Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mt. 16:18).

Don't we believe that great hymn *Onward Christian Soldiers?*

Crowns and thrones may perish, Kingdoms rise and wane,
But the Church of Jesus constant will remain;
Gates of hell can never 'gainst that church prevail;
We have Christ's own promise, and that cannot fail.

So, the notion that the "Church of Christ" is the true, restored church of the New Testament, to the exclusion of all others, and that the church did not even exist for more than a thousand years of "dark ages" is an idea that contradicts not only our own good sense, but the Scriptures themselves and even our own pioneers.

We must rather believe that the church of Jesus Christ has always existed and that it consists of all those who "believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and who obey him in all things according to their understanding," to quote Alexander Campbell again.

3. *Churches of Christ can never be a part of a unity movement so long as they see themselves as the only Christians and thus assume an exclusivistic posture.*

How can we plead for unity when we keep ourselves apart and not have anything to do with other churches and other believers?

In its very essence, whether in nature or in social institutions, unity is oneness in diversity, as in a marriage. If unity implies diversity and we insist on uniformity where everyone has to believe exactly the same way, we forfeit our role as a unity people. All we are left with is to declare to other believers that they must leave where they are and join us. The way to unity is for everyone to be like the Church of Christ! This can be embarrassing, for someone may point to the fact that even we are divided several different ways.

If we take unity seriously, we must be able to accept others as equals in Christ, and thus sit down with them as fellow Christians. We must "Accept one another even as Christ has accepted you, to the glory of God" (Rom. 15:7). Were we not all still wrong about some things when Christ accepted us? Then we can accept others even when they ,are mistaken about some things. When we do that it is to the glory of God. When we accept people only when they conform to "our" church, it is to the glory of a party.

4. *Such a claim stands on the false premise that there can be perfect knowledge and perfect obedience.*

We have wrongly taught our people in Churches of Christ that they have to be right about everything to be acceptable to God. The truth is that we can never be acceptable to God on the basis of our own goodness, our own works, or even by perfect knowledge and obedience. We are right with God not because of what we have done but because of what God has done for us through Christ. We are saved "not by any work of righteousness which we have done ourselves but by his mercy" (Tit. 3:5). We find too little grace in the gospel. Everything has to be right and exact, with no variation. We cannot allow, for example, that one might be *outwardly* mistaken on baptism, such as being baptized other than by immersion, but *inwardly* right in that he has a pure and obedient heart (a distinction that our own Alexander Campbell made!) — and so one is not a Christian if not baptized (outwardly) in exactly the right way!

This is not the way our Lord saw things. When one of his apostles rejected a fellow worker because "he followeth not with us," Jesus responded, "Forbid him not, for he that is not against us is for us" (Lk. 9:50). Here is a lesson in toleration for any of us who are more demanding of others than we are of ourselves.

5. *The claim is based upon a damaging fallacy: that if we accept people we therefore approve of all they believe and practice.*

When we enjoy fellowship with John Henry Newman by singing his great hymn "Lead, Kindly Light" does that mean that we approve of everything that Roman Catholics believe and practice, including the encyclicals of the pope? I f we can sing the hymns of other believers, is it all that different for them to be with us in our churches and teach us by word of mouth as well as through a hymnal?

Could not the black Church of Christ have accepted Martin Luther King, Jr. as a fellow Christian without approving of everything Baptists believe and practice? The apostle Paul would never have written "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations" (Rom. 14:1) if we had to approve everything about the man we accept.

We can accept the divorced without approving of divorce; we can accept the homosexual without approving of homosexual practices. And so we can accept the person who may hold doctrinal error (and which of us is perfect in doctrine?) without approving of his error.

This is the nature of Christian unity: *we accept each other because of our mutual love of Christ, not because of conformity of doctrine.* And this is the function of love, which "binds all things together in perfect unity" (Col. 3:14, TEV). We accept each other because we love each other, warts and all. If we as God's people cannot accept all others who are His people, then what does it mean to be His church?

6. *Such a claim is sectarian and puts us in the same category with other sects and cults.*

We can believe we are right without believing that everyone else is wrong. It is the sectarian spirit that presumes that it and it alone is the true Body of Christ. This is the difference between a denomination and a sect. While a denomination sees itself as a part of the church at large, a sect believes itself to be the totality of the church, the *only* Christians. We cannot be sectarians because sectarianism is a sin against God, as Gal. 5:20 makes clear: "parties, factions, divisions" are listed among works of the flesh, along with adultery, hatred, and witchcraft. If we resent it when the Mormons claim to be "the restored church of Jesus Christ" to the exclusion of all others, we can be sure that others resent it (and justly so) when we make the same claim.

7. *Such a claim is now rejected by many in the Churches of Christ, if not the vast majority, and it should be renounced by all as a relic of our past.*

Even though Jamie Buckingham as recently as July, 1984 (in the magazine named *Charisma)* described the Church of Christ as believing themselves to be the only ones truly saved, there is abundant evidence that our people are discarding that sectarian posture. When Richard N. Ady polled his own Church of Christ in Santa Rosa, Ca., he found that 85% of his people believed there were Christians in other denominations. It is highly probable that such a percentage would hold up in most of our churches. The reason

is clear enough: we cannot be an effective witnessing Christian community if we set ourselves apart from other Christians and have no working fellowship with them. The problems of the world are so serious that it is imperative that all believers in Christ work together for the redemption of troubled mankind.

Churches of Christ are becoming a more responsible, a more reasonable, and a more loving and accepting people. We believe this will be true of our black churches as well, seeing that they, too, like Thomas Campbell, are getting sick and tired of the janglings and jarrings of sectarian strife.

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THE "ONE BAPTISM" AND FELLOWSHIP

(This was originally a letter to Arnold Hardin of Dallas, TX, editor of The Persuader. *We present it here as an article in that its subject will be of interest to our readers.* —the Editor)

I agree with you — and with Paul and with Alexander Campbell that the seven ones of Eph. 4, which Campbell liked to call "the seven facts," are the basis for unity. They are indeed *facts* or propositions and form the essence of the gospel, for they point to what God has done for us through Christ. They are not seven opinions, though there are countless opinions as to what they may mean or imply. So, while I believe that the seven facts are necessary to unity, I cannot believe that anyone's *opinion* about them is essential to unity. There are many opinions, for example, about "the one Spirit" — how he functions, his gifts, glossolalia, etc. — and while these may be held as opinion they cannot be made a test of fellowship. But anyone who repudiates the "one Spirit" as a fact or a reality could not be a true believer.

While I believe the seven unities of Eph. 4 to be essential to unity and fellowship, I do not believe that a perfect understanding or compliance to them is essential. If perfection is required, we are all doomed, for who has made a perfect response to the "one hope" or to the "one Lord." It appears that some early Christians, such as in Corinth, were still affected by idolatry, even though they accepted the fact of the "one God and Father of us all." It is a matter of one's heart and mind being turned in the right direction, and not a matter of perfect knowledge or perfect response.

Most of my brethren in Churches of Christ would agree with me that on six of these facts there might be imperfection in knowledge and obedience. Even though we are strongly church-oriented, few would say that we have to know everything about the "one body" to be true Christians, or even the "one faith," however much we have taught about it. So with the one God, one Spirit, one Lord, and one hope.

The hang-up is on the "one baptism," for here we demand perfection across the board, whether it be the mode, design, or meaning of baptism. While all believers accept what Eph. 4:5 actually says, that there is "one baptism," we insist that they accept our interpretation of its meaning and obey the ordinance as we understand it, before we acknowledge them as Christians. Many among us even insist that one must understand *why* he is baptized, and they dictate the *why* — one must understand he is baptized for the remission of sins.

Nearly all believers would grant that no one is a true Christian who repudiates any ordinance of God, including baptism. Anyone who *rejects* baptism rejects the counsel of God (Lk. 7:30) and falls short of the basis of unity as prescribed in Eph. 4.

But suppose one has both accepted and obeyed the ordinance of baptism "in his heart," as Campbell put it, "while mistaking the form" (assuming immersion to be the correct form or mode)? Is he in the same category as one who has repudiated the ordinance? Is he not a Christian for lack of enough water, being only sprinkled rather than immersed?

We should be able to see why Alexander Campbell wrote as he did on this matter:

"I cannot, therefore, make anyone duty the standard of Christian state or character, not even immersion into the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and in my heart regard all that have been sprinkled in infancy without their own knowledge and consent, as aliens from Christ and the well-grounded hope of heaven."

Campbell anticipated the question that is often asked, "How do you know that one loves Christ except by his obedience to his commandments?" His answer was:

"In no other way. But mark, I do not substitute obedience to one commandment, for universal or even for general obedience. And should I see a sectarian Baptist or a Pedobaptist more spiritually-minded, more generally conformed to the requisitions of the Messiah, than one who precisely acquiesces with me in the theory or practice of immersion as I teach, doubtless the former rather than the latter, would have my cordial

approbation and love as a Christian. So I judge and so I feel. It is the image of Christ the Christian looks for and loves; and this does not consist in being exact in a few items, but in general devotion to the whole truth as far as known."

And Campbell drew the same distinction that I did above, between mistakes of the mind and mistakes of the heart: "With me mistakes of the understanding and errors of the affection are not to be confounded. They are as distant as the poles. An angel may mistake the meaning of a commandment, but he will obey it in the sense in which he understands it. "

He goes on to say what is badly needed in the thinking of Church of Christ folk: "Many a good man has been mistaken. Mistakes are to be regarded as culpable and as declarative of a corrupt heart only when they proceed from a willful neglect of the means of knowing what is commanded. Ignorance is always a crime when it is voluntary; and innocent when it is involuntary."

In the same essay, which is found in *Millennia! Harbinger* (1837), p. 411, he answers the question *Who is a Christian?*

"I answer, Everyone that believes in his heart that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Son of God; repents of his sins, and obeys him in all things according to his measure of knowledge of his will."

These reflections from Alexander Campbell are especially significant since he championed the cause of baptism by immersion and for the remission of sins as much as any theologian in modern times.

Campbell or not, we must not impose upon the "one baptism" of Eph. 4 what is not there. If we make it mean "one immersion," we do so only by ignoring the context. The apostle is affirming oneness for Jewish and Gentile believers. Jews and Gentiles are in the one body and worship the one God and share the one faith and the one hope. They look to the one Lord and are infused by the same Spirit. In this context it would mean little to speak of one *immersion* — as if there could be more than one!

This is why we err when we make baptism *mean* immersion. It means no such thing, even if it was by immersion. The Greek word etymologically means *to dip* or *to immerse,* but words are not to be judged simply by etymology. If so, we would have to revise our dictionary, for words are not defined by their origin as much as by their use. The word

candidate, for example, means “one who comes out dressed in white” if you go by etymology, but we know it does not mean that. The word dean means “a leader of ten men” etymologically, but its real meaning is different.

We believe we can establish that baptism was practiced by immersion by the early church, but that does not make baptism *mean* immersion. If we sought a word that best expressed its meaning, it might be *initiation.* This gives meaning to the “one baptism” of Eph. 4. The apostle is saying that everyone is initiated into the community of Christ alike — one initiation for Jews and Gentiles. This gives meaning to similar passages, such as Lk. 7:30 where the Pharisees and lawyers rejected God’s counsel by rejecting John’s baptism. It is not that they rejected immersion, but they rejected the initiatory ceremony that would have inducted them into the community John was preparing for the coming Christ. The Great Commission is similar: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them.” While the act of baptism was by dipping in water, its meaning was something like initiation or enrollment, as the term “make disciples” would suggest. There was a rite whereby they were to be enrolled in the school of Christ. In this instance we might say that baptism means enrollment.

I say this in order to observe that John the Baptist or Jesus and his disciples did not *choose* immersion or dipping in water as the rite of initiation into the new community. Jesus did not invent or originate immersion as a ceremony. Neither did John the Baptist. When the Pharisees observed John baptizing, they knew exactly what he was doing. It was a familiar rite, long practiced by the Jews. What upset the Pharisees was that John was relating this old rite of initiation to a coming Christ and a coming kingdom of God, thus calling for their repentance.

While Paul later found great symbolic value in immersion, as in Rom. 6, we are not to presume that the founders of the church selected it for this reason, for they did not select it at all. They used the rite that was familiar, but elevated it to greater significance. It could be argued that the practice of immersion (washings) among the Jews was part of the preparation that the God of heaven made for the coming of the Messiah and his community, and so he had baptism there as a recognized rite of initiation when John came on the scene. But it could also be argued that it did not matter all that much, that John sought for an initiatory symbol of some sort, something for the people to do as a “stepping out” act of decision, so he simply used what was already known and practiced, giving it special meaning. He *might* have used something else, such as anointing the eyes with clay and spittle, followed by washing the eyes, a rite Jesus used at least once.

But my point is that the *meaning* of John's baptism (and of Christian baptism that followed) was not that it was immersion but that it was an act of initiation into a new community. Immersion was but its mode.

If you ask the *So what?* of all this, it is that we may miss the point of baptism when we are preoccupied with its mode, and especially when we labor to make baptism mean immersion. It is risky to equate baptism with immersion, as if they were synonymous. Of the hundreds of translations of the New Testament hardly any dares to substitute immersion for baptism, not even those translations made by those who practice immersion. Our own Alexander Campbell is an exception in that in his *Living Oracles* immerse and immersion displace baptize and baptism, the wisdom of which can be and has been seriously questioned.

To impose immersion upon some passages, as if it was the *meaning* of the original Greek word, is to make them awkward to say the least, Eph. 4:5 being one of them: to say "one Lord, one faith, one immersion" is not the same as saying "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." One points to the mode of the rite; the other points to the rite itself. Despite our complaints to the contrary, it is probably just as well that the Greek word has through the years been consistently transliterated *baptize* and *baptism.* Perhaps that too has been the providence of God.

Another part of the So *what?* is that other modes of baptism are rendered less offensive. After all, we level a serious indictment against most of the Christian world when we make baptism mean immersion, which implies a degeneracy on the part of those who do not see and practice baptism the way we do. If it is as "simple" and "clear" as we claim, why does such an infinitesimal part of the Christian world insist on immersion? Many who practice other modes readily admit that immersion was the primitive mode, but they believe the sprinkling of water captures the meaning of the initiatory rite as well as immersion, and that they are in no wise rejecting the ordinance of baptism. Are we to dechristianize them for this?

We should at least be able to see that those who have been "sprinkled" or "poured" *have* submitted to an initiatory act. It is not as if they have rejected baptism or not been baptized at all. They have "stepped out" and declared themselves as part of the Christian community by being baptized, even if it was not by the mode used by John and the primitive church.

How important is this "mistake" (as most of you and I see it) to the God of heaven? Is the difference in the amount of water between sprinkling and immersion of great import to Jesus Christ? I do not know. Speaking for myself, I was immersed and this is what I believe. It is also what I must practice. It would have to be a very unusual circumstance for me to sprinkle someone, but I suppose I would do so if immersion were impossible. This is almost certainly how other modes started, as a sincere effort to obey an ordinance of God in dire circumstances, not as a repudiation of immersion or even as an indifference to immersion. We as immersionists must rid ourselves of the ungracious notion that those who do not baptize the way we do have rebellious and disobedient hearts. They can be mistaken without being degenerate. And they can be mistaken and still be Christians who are pleasing to God, just as we can still be Christians when we are mistaken.

Our position on immersion would be much stronger if we could prove that (1) baptism *means* immersion; (2) baptism by immersion was *chosen* (originated) by John and Jesus rather than borrowed from current practice; (3) that any other mode is absolutely and incontrovertibly unacceptable and invalid to the Lord Jesus Christ and the God of heaven. I cannot prove any of these things, so while I remain an immersionist I nonetheless accept as Christians those who practice other modes.

Since some of my readers may be of the persuasion of some of those to whom Alexander Campbell was writing in the quotations given above, I will close with one more statement of his from the same essay:

"My correspondent may belong to a class who think that we detract from the authority and value of an institution the moment we admit the bare possibility of anyone being saved without it." —*the Editor*

BOOK NOTES

If you are interested in Old Testament studies, you should be reminded of the excellent Daily Bible Studies, patterned after Barclay's NT series and done by British scholars. The newest volumes are *1* & 2 *Chronicles* and *Twelve Prophets.* Others are *Genesis* (two vols.), *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, 1* & 2 *Samuel, Psalms* (two vols.), *Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel.* They are 7.95 each, postpaid, softcover. They are handsome books and excellent

commentaries, easy to read. You can get them one at a time and stop when you wish. The entire OT will eventually be done in matching volumes.

If you prefer the beauty of the old King James Bible, you will be interested in the *New King James Bible*, a recently published work that *is* the old KJV with archaic and unfamiliar words updated. The beautiful, hardbound volume is only 12.95 postpaid.

Thomas W. Phillips' *The Church of Christ* is an old classic among our people, written by one close to the pioneer period. Its unsectarian approach will encourage you. The reprinted edition, which is highly readable, is only 5.95 postpaid.

The Mormon Papers by Harry L. Ropp not only lays bare the unreliability of the Mormon scriptures, but it tells you how to deal with Mormon missionaries. The letter from an Egyptologist, who exposed the fraud of the Book of Abraham, will interest you. A Mormon himself, he resigned, telling the First Presidency in Salt Lake City that he did not want to belong to a church that tells lies. 4.50 postpaid.

Interpreting Revelation by Merrill C. Tenney continues to be popular with our readers. It may well be the most informative book one can read on Revelation. 9.95 postpaid.

The Lord's Supper by William Barclay was out of print and in demand. It will surprise you how much there is to be known about the origin and nature of the Supper. 5.95 postpaid for the new edition.

Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free by F. F. Bruce is a veritable gold mine of information, not only about Paul and his writings but about the primitive church, and interestingly written. It is expensive at 16.95, but it is a substantial volume of over 500 pages, and offers you more than several smaller volumes.

Memoirs of Alexander Campbell remains in print at 21.95 postpaid, and this is the one book that is a *must* if you are serious about studying our history.

It is not a must, but we think you would enjoy reading Leroy Garrett's *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An Anecdotal History of Three Churches.* A recent recommendation of the book comes from faraway Australia. The editor of *The Australian Christian,* the national journal of Churches of Christ in Australia, says the price is dear at 24.50, but "it is fascinating reading and worth every cent." He says every church and college library should have a copy. He advises his readers to buy a copy for their minister, and then read his copy! That has been one of our problems, for a lot of people seem to read it without buying it. Our price is only 21.95 if you send a check with your order.

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

A new, $7 million Mormon temple has been built in opulent North Dallas. While only the duly initiated and sanctified can enter such sanctuaries once they are dedicated, the Dallas temple was open to the public until the time for the laying on of hands, and I was one of the thousands of visitors, most of whom I would guess were non-Mormons. I was treated royally and visited personally with several leading Mormons. I will reciprocate by writing of my experience in an essay entitled "Inside a Temple Built by Man," which you will want to read. But I cannot promise that it will gain a place with the literature distributed at the visitors' center at the Dallas temple!

One hundred men from Christian Churches and Churches of Christ met August 7-9 at Ozark Bible College in Missouri in what they called "Restoration Summit." The purpose of the meeting was to help heal the division between the two churches. Some of those on the program were Monroe Hawley, Furman Kearley, and Reuel Lemmons from Churches of Christ, and Fred Thompson, W. F. Lown, and Sam Stone from Christian Churches. Sam Stone, editor of the *Christian Standard*, expressed what was surely the prevailing attitude of those gathered when he reported on the meeting in his journal: "We will find many more things on which we agree than on which we disagree. And where we do disagree, we must seek to do so without being disagreeable." Jon Jones, minister to the Richland Hills Church of Christ in Fort Worth, addressed his congregation on a Sunday evening on his impressions of the gathering. He said he was motivated to make more contact with his brothers in the Christian Churches, and he suggested that some of them be invited by his church as guest speakers. All reports indicate that a fine brotherly spirit prevailed. It might be well that future gatherings include women and more folk from the rank and file.

The Central Church of Christ in Irving (Dallas) is sponsoring a conference for free, changing Churches of Christ, Jan. 17-19. Central is ideally located for such a gathering, being near the DFW airport, which allows people easy access from all over the nation. The newest directory of Churches of Christ, called *Where The Saints Meet*, published by the Firm Foundation Pub. Co., dares to classify the churches racially, linguistically, doctrinally — and the categories number 42! Over 50 churches are classified as "E" churches, presumably meaning ecumenical, though the "Key" describes them as "more progressive spirit, less attention to traditional issues, and more openness to persons among the denominations." While the Central church is designated an "E" church in the directory, they are inviting to the conference not only the "E" churches but all others, churches and individuals alike, who see themselves caught up in the winds of change, leaving it to each one to decide if the conference is for him or her. Subjects to be discussed in both panels

and small groups will include the ministry of women, dealing with sectarianism, the nature of worship, the mission and destiny of the freer churches, and what is going on in the more open churches. Write for further information to the church at 1710 West Airport Fwy. Irving, Tx. 75060.

I visited with the Central Church of Christ in Irving (Dallas) on a recent Sunday and was impressed when several couples with new babies were made part of a special "thanksgiving" service for the new arrivals. It was the first time ever I had seen what some would call a "dedication" service in one of our churches. There was also a solo, which is very unusual for our people, and the soloist was a woman, which is even more unusual, though I had seen that before at Belmont in Nashville and Burke Road in Houston. The Central leadership wisely prepared the congregation for these innovations by consulting with the members in advance and telling them when it was going to happen. Apparently no problem.

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READERS' EXCHANGE

Enclosed is a copy of a letter I sent to Kenneth Copeland, Kenneth Hagin, and Pat Robertson, asking them how God speaks to them. All three answered me. Copeland said if I would send $24 for tapes they would probably answer my questions. Hagin said that if I would pray about it God would start speaking to me. Robertson said I just wasn't listening. —*G. H. Roux, 938 Willow St., Wood River, IL 62095.*

(Part of the problem with "God speaks to me" may be semantical. Yes, God may "speak" (Is that the world to use?) to us through a book, a friend, a spouse, an enemy, an experience, and even in our own thoughts, what some would call intuition. The problem with all these is that they are subjective and we cannot be sure. Feelings can be very deceptive. It may even be Satan speaking to us instead of God. But truth has a way of authenticating itself, and we can usually determine what is right and good, whatever its source. But if I understand these modern prophets they are saying that God speaks to them like He spoke to Moses and Jesus. This I do not believe. Whatever "comes into my mind" is not necessarily the voice of God, even if it be true. I am very uncomfortable with such language as "God said to me" unless the reference is to the holy Scriptures. The Holy Spirit within us is a comforter and even an enlightener, but not a revealer. God's disclosure we already have in the Bible. —*Ed.*)

Thank you for the scholarly rebuttal to so many time-honored arguments that have deceived so many of us for years. Your journal is very much appreciated by those in our fellowship here. I love you, though I've never seen you. We need your voice! I am part of a seven family fellowship meeting in a home. We all have Church of Christ backgrounds. Please pray that God will continue to give us wisdom and grace to grow and learn, edify one another, and reach out to our community. —*Steve Isgitt, Rt. I, Box 217-P, Hempstead, TX. 77445.*

I truly enjoy your publication and thank you for the work you are doing toward the unity of all God's children. May God bless your efforts and permit you to continue for many years. —*Terry L. Medley, 3211 Southberry Cir., Canton, OH 44706.*

I wrote to *The Disciple*, and they printed the letter, that it was my hope that such people as you could grace the platform of the General Assembly (Disciples of Christ) and that there would be mutual exchange at the North American. I think the voice of moderation needs to be heard in these circles. The editor of *The Disciple* voiced similar thoughts in an editorial. —*A. William Johnson, 227 E. Sandra, Tulare, CA. 93274.*

Ouida and I want to thank the many who sent condolences during the recent loss of our little granddaughter. I am trying to send a note to everyone who wrote, but it is a slow process. While we are left stunned and chastened by the loss, we nonetheless continue to thank God that Christi was with us for a time. The other night Ouida had a very realistic dream about her. She sees Christi in a park-like setting, playing with other children. She calls her to her and gets a big hug and kisses, which was very consoling to Ouida, as if it were real. When a caretaker leads Christi away into a kind of nowhere (or everywhere!), she goes along willingly, as if she understood. Ouida told me the dream and then said there was something very unusual, *Christi was bigger!* To which I said, *Of course, she's three months older!* I will sometime share with you my view of soul growth, how life really begins at death, how the spirit moves into an etheric (spiritual) body and continues to grow, learn, serve and worship God. Mothers will see the infants they have lost, not as infants but as mature beings, as per the Father's intention, and they will recognize them, just as Ouida and I will some day see Christi full grown— that is, if we remain in the flesh long enough! In the meantime Phoebe, Christi's mother is doing well, and during the summer I took Ashley, Christi's 9-year old brother, with me to Colorado and Saskatchewan, where he was treated gloriously, then to the Ozarks in Arkansas, where we go each summer, and finally to south Texas and Mexico. Ashley was first afraid to fly, but now he wants to fly everywhere. We all thank you for caring. —*the Editor*

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